

**SOFTENING THE HEART  
OF A CONVICT**



**JAKE OPPENHEIMER,  
CALLED**

**“THE PRISON TIGER”**

**DESCRIBES HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE  
WITH THE STRAIGHT-JACKET, IN WHICH  
HE WAS TORTURED FOR 110 HOURS**

**Published by  
ED MORRELL**

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ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS

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## PREFACE.

In presenting this little booklet for publication, I am going to tear aside the curtain of mystery surrounding a human life and allow the world to obtain a glimpse of the real man, Oppenheimer.

I believe without doubt there exists no living being more misunderstood than this man, whom the newspapers have characterized by the gruesome appellation "The Human Tiger."

His boyhood and early youth was cast in so fearful an environment it could hardly be otherwise expected but his life should go counter to man-made edicts; and in his early twenties he found himself counted among the proscribed. It was then his terrible career began.

The very qualities he innately possessed that should under a rational and scientific system of correction have redeemed him to a life of usefulness and possibly great honor only served to plunge him deeper in his downward path. These very qualities, I repeat, were accepted as an added evidence of his criminal viciousness, were cast in the balance against him and made his life a hell on earth.

During long years in the silent cage of solitary confinement beside Oppenheimer, I was privileged to witness numerous examples of his Spartan nature, which under other conditions of life, such as in the days of chivalry, would have proclaimed him a hero. After my release from solitary, while I was head trusty at San Quentin prison, I never allowed an opportunity to pass without endeavoring to make the prison officials see what manner of man Oppenheimer really was, but without avail.

They would not, or could not, understand him, and in the four years since my pardon, I have alone, with the single exception of his attorney, G. C. Ringolsky, fought the battle for his life. I have submitted his case personally to the foremost authorities of America; sociologists and psychologists of note have passed their opinion concerning this sphynx of the prison cage. With one or two exceptions, all concur in the faith of his reformation and redemption.

Trusting that our Christian nation will be as charitable in its verdict as these intelligent authorities have shown themselves to be, I launch this plea for a human soul in torment.

Sincerely yours,

ED. MORRELL.

Oakland, June 10th, 1912.

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## SOFTENING THE HEART OF A CONVICT.

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### Jake Oppenheimer, Called the "Prison Tiger," Describes His First Experience With the Strait-Jacket in Which He Was Tortured for 110 Hours.

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I gazed at it with curiosity.

It was made of coarse canvas, was about four feet long, and on the sides had brass eyelets about four inches apart. On the inside of the jacket were two canvas pockets.

It was in the hand of "Give-a-dam," the guard. In his other hand he held a stout cord. Standing in the center of the cell "Give-a-dam" ordered me with an oath to put my arms into the pockets. Then he wrapped the canvas folds about me, and, inserting the cord through the eyelets, began lacing it tight across my back.

This accomplished, he jerked me off my feet and flung me face-down on the floor. He braced his foot against my back and laced the cord still tighter until my breath came in short, hard gasps. Then he turned me over on my back and stood regarding me with a fiendish look of delight. Finally he said, turning to the warden:

"I've fixed him, Warden, as snug as a bug in a rug."

"We'll make a good job of him," replied the warden, a wicked smile overspreading his features. And with that comforting assurance they left me.

I have read, in the course of the past four years, in various histories, of many modes of torture, such as breaking men's bones on the wheel, stretching them on racks, crushing their bones with heavy irons, placing heavy rocks on their chests, tearing their finger and toe-nails out with pincers, burning them with red-hot irons, flogging them with whips on the ends of which were tacks, cutting pieces of flesh from them and pouring salt and vinegar on their wounds, covering their bodies with syrup and placing ants thereon to bite them, covering their hair with oil and setting fire to it, roasting their feet, toasting their hands, placing a barrel of water over their heads and letting it drop, drop by drop thereon, placing a rat inside an iron basin, tying it to the victim and letting the rat eat its way through the unfortunate's body, impaling him on sharp-pointed sticks, crucifying him, burning him at the stake, dragging him to death, smothering him in an air-tight compartment, pot-heading him, tying him to limbs of trees to be pulled apart, burying him alive, stinging him to death, boiling him in oil, frightening him to death with horrible groans and demoniac magic lantern pictures, sawing him in half between two boards, feeding him alive to sharks, throwing the tomahawk at his head and making him run the gauntlet, pricking him with needles, confining him with poisonous reptiles, ducking him, starving him to death, all of which is very terrible indeed. But no conceivable torture could be worse than the 110 hours' continuous compression in that canvas constrictor that I suffered—my first experience in the jacket that has killed and maimed many prisoners.



I had not been in it 15 minutes when sharp, needle-like pains began shooting through my fingers, hands and arms, which gradually extended to my shoulders. Within half an hour these pains shot back and forth like lightning. Cramping pains clutched my bowels; my breath pained with a hot, dry sensation; the brass rivets on one side ate into my flesh, and the cord ground into my back until the slightest movement, even breathing, was an added agony.

My head grew hot and feverish, and a burning thirst seized me which compelled me every few minutes to call the guard for water, whereupon I was slightly raised and the fluid poured down my throat.

As the hours and days passed the anguish became more and more unbearable. I slept neither night or day, and how slowly, especially at night when all was silent in the prison, the hours dragged—as though weighted with lead!

The bodily excretions over which I had no control in the canvas vice, ate into my bruised limbs, adding pain to pain. My fingers, hands and arms finally became numb, and paralyzing shocks stunned my brain.

Had I been offered a dose of poison I would have drunk it with gratitude.

Thus I suffered for four days and 14 hours incessantly.



At the conclusion of that period, the warden ordered "Give-a-dam" to remove the jacket, which he did. Released from its pressure, I attempted to gain my feet, but was too weak. My limbs were temporarily paralyzed. Seeing my condition, "Give-a-dam" scowled, seized me by the shoulders and jerked me to my feet. I leaned against the wall for support, and then, after a brief rest, reeled off to my cell, where I sank on my mattress in utter collapse and lay for a long time like a log.

After a time, mustering all my strength, I gained a sitting posture and finally managed to drag off my saturated clothes.

What a sight I beheld. My hands, arms and thighs were frightfully bruised and had all the colors of the rainbow. My body was shriveled like that of an old man, and a horrible stench came from it.

Crawling to the water bucket, I bathed the stinging bruises, and then, entirely exhausted, sank down on my mattress, covered myself with a blanket and never rose from it for a week.

Sometime later I learned from a reliable source that it had been the warden's intention to kill me in the strait-jacket, and that "Give-a-dam" was perfectly willing to act as the tool, but it seems the captain of the guards remonstrated with the warden, saying that if I died an investigation would in all probability be agitated by the Jewish people of San Francisco and a scandal follow. The warden gave the reluctant order to release me. I believe I owe my life that time to the fact that I am a Jew.

The public is so used to hearing the strait-jacket's use for the protection of insane patients that it thinks of no torture connected with it. But the method of using the restraining jacket on the insane and its use in prison is vastly different.

In prison it is an instrument of hellish torture, and its very innocence of appearance serves to divert attention from it. Prisoners have been killed and crippled for life in the jacket. I know of four prisoners in San Quentin who in one year attempted suicide rather than be subjected to its tortures.

There are ways enough to punish a prisoner without resorting to such savage methods, and in my opinion kindly treatment can more easily soften the heart of the most hardened criminal than all the strait-jackets that any man's devilish ingenuity ever manufactured.

# THOUGHTS ON CHILD LIFE FROM THE CONDEMNED CELL.

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By Jake Oppenheimer.

Children are the most precious gems that come from Nature's treasure-house, virgin jewels entrancing us with the purity of their light. They are the perfect flowers beside which all others, even the violet and rose, fade into insignificance.

Their innocence, like a perfume, purifies the atmosphere of sordid thoughts, and makes the savage and cruel-minded pause and inhale the sweetness of its fragrance. To gaze at these flowers causes the heart to beat afresh with the joy of youth, the eyes to beam with renewed hope and pride and tenderness. To rear and protect them mothers must brave even death itself.

There are doubtless many who love gold, have no eyes but for ambition, no ears but for the cry of glory; and if their selfish aims are gratified they imagine themselves blessed, and famous beyond the average of humankind. But these self-deluded are poor, very poor compared with parents. It is they who possess the real priceless treasures of Nature, who are far more wealthy than the childless multi-millionaire, far more to be envied than the most powerful monarch who sits sonless on his throne.

There are persons who delight in the magnificence of a palace, or seek to do honor to the presence of a mighty king; who view with enthusiasm the splendor of a pageant; are wonderstruck by the boom of heaven's artillery and the fantastic play of lightning; gaze with awe on the beauty of the celestial spheres; stand spelbound at the glory of a sunset; behold with astonishment the boundless ocean, the grandeur of snow-capped peaks. But what are all these works of Nature in comparison with children?

They are more beautiful in structure than the most splendid palace. In them are hidden forces that are destined to outrival the most powerful potentate.

Can the most gorgeous pageant hold one's interest as long as a group of merry children?

The wonder of the heavens, the glory of sunset and mountains and the mystery of the sea are all equalled by the mind and heart of a child.

In children is the consolation and hope of humanity; they hold the mirror of trustfulness and love, and are the real harbingers of joy.

If you wish to banish unhappiness, watch children at play. Observe a little group playing "ring-around-a-rosy"; see that little tot with golden hair shedding sunshine all about her; look at the winsome fairy who with sparkling eyes diffuses vivacity into the game, while the brown-haired darling next her makes the very air vibrate with the melody of laughter; gaze at that little blossom in the center with roses for cheeks—a dancing, prancing image of health and joy. Witness their starry eyes; their waving hair, brown, black, and golden; their pearly teeth, ruby lips and shell-like ears; the bloom of their cheeks and satiny skin;

their twinkling feet and swaying forms. Where can you find such pictures of beauty, grace, happiness and innocence? Where exist such flowers? Where in the wide world can you find such jewels as these?

Here is Nature in all its richness, in all its purity, in all its vitality—in its real perfection.

Will not such a sight make one feel more optimistic, more liberal-minded, more tender toward the world at large? Surely I believe so.

Let us then take more notice of these lovely flowers of Nature and cultivate their love with a greater assiduity than we give to wealth, fame or name; for they are the joy bringers of the human race, and any one who passes them by, preferring such empty baubles as gold, glory or ambition, is simply closing his eyes and missing the happiest hours of his life.

Folsom Prison, May 28, 1912.

## WHY CAN'T THE STATE MAKE MEN, IN- STEAD OF BREAKING THEM?

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(By Edward Morrell.)

If the manager of a shoe factory had 40 per cent of his output returned every month as being unsatisfactory, how long do you suppose he would continue business on the same old lines? Would it be for years? And yet this is the stupid and uneconomic way of attending to the State's business. The most important asset of a nation is its citizens.

For years we have recognized that the possibilities of molding human beings are practically limitless, and still there are over 100,000 of our citizens shut away in prisons, given poor and scanty food, poor and scanty light, air and sunshine; for the most part forced to hard labor like slaves, or compelled to sit in solitude and idleness, driven by brutal taskmasters, subjected to frequent and fiendish tortures and punishments, periodically released so broken and warped in body and spirit that almost half are made even more unfit than they were to take up the burden of citizenship, and are henceforth doomed to return, thus keeping up the weary treadmill. What is everybody's business is nobody's business, and the most of us have been so occupied by what we thought were our own affairs that we have allowed it to go on by itself, until now we have 3000 prisoners in this State alone. True to its characteristic of doing everything on a large scale, California far exceeds the average. Think of the burden in taxes!

Half a million must be expended annually—  
and for what?

To manufacture criminals, for that is what it amounts to. The very fact that almost every employer looks askance on an ex-prisoner; that some corporations even make a hard-and-fast rule never to employ such under any circumstances, points to our unconscious recognition of the utter futility of the system on the basis of punishment pure and simple. The fundamental purpose of punishment is corrective; "a burnt child dreads the fire," and yet Society acts on the belief that all the anguish of disgrace and imprisonment has only served to make the man more willing to take a second risk. This seems paradoxical; in reality it is a complete though unconscious admission of the fact that the State has done everything to be thought of to degrade men, and nothing—aye, worse than nothing—to develop that good latent in each human being. That torture and abuse do not benefit; that repression and solitary confinement do not reform, is what Edward Morrell is trying to put before the people. He is not the champion of crime or criminals, nor is it his desire to make summer resorts of our penitentiaries; but long years of intelligent observation on the inside have made it possible for him to speak with an authority given to few, and demonstrate to the citizens just what they are paying taxes for.



Is a system that makes more criminals economical? Is it worthy the intelligence and humanity of this twentieth century? Why should not California be in the vanguard of States to save both money and men by making its penal institutions self-supporting?

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Mr. Morrell is fast becoming one of the noted speakers of California, and holds his audience spell-bound from start to finish. His demonstrations of the instruments of torture employed right up to the present time in our California prisons will prove a revelation to almost every citizen, appalling each with horror at what is being done by an enlightened and humane State. Seventy-five per cent of the net proceeds of Mr. Morrill's lectures go to the support of the Employment Bureau for Ex-Prisoners, 508-510 Pacific Building, San Francisco, Cal.

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